

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02
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AGRE-00 IO-13 TRSE-00 /097 W
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R 260500Z JUL 77
FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8364
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY ROME
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
AMCONSUL UDORN
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 VIENTIANE 1093

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: EAID EAGR SOCI SWEL LA SREF VM
SUBJECT: FOOD SHORTAGES THROUGHOUT LPDR; 1977 HARVEST THREATENED

REF: A VIENTIANE 1019, B 76 VIENTIANE 1884

SUMMARY: AFTER MAKING A TOUR OF SEVERE DROUGHT AREAS
UNDP AND FAO OFFICIALS DECIDED TO PROVIDE ALTERNATIVE
CROP SEEDS, INSECTICIDES, AND PERHAPS RICE TO THE
LPDR. FOOD PRICES IN RURAL PROVINCES ARE CONSIDERABLY
LOWER THAN IN VIENTIANE BUT FOOD IS REPORTEDLY SCARCE.
FOOD STAPLES ARE EITHER UNAVAILABLE OR SCARCE IN THE
VIENTIANE FREE MARKET AND RURAL VILLAGES IN THE
VIENTIANE PLAIN. GOVERNMENT ACTIONS TO CUT RICE
RATIONS SOLD TO ITS EMPLOYEES AND TO BAN HUNTING OF
WILD ANIMALS FURTHER LIMITS AVAILABLE FOOD SOURCES.
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WESTERN DOCTORS REPORT A HIGHER INCIDENCE OF MAL-
NUTRITION AMONG THE POPULATION.

1. TWO UNDP OFFICIALS AND AN FAO AGRICULTURAL EXPERT
VISITED FARM LANDS NEAR THAKHEK AND SAVANNAKHET
JULY 20 THROUGH 22 TO SURVEY CROP DAMAGE CAUSED BY
DROUGHT (REF A). UNDP OFFICIAL TOLD EMBOFF THAT

ALTHOUGH THE LPDR-UNDP STATISTICS ON PERCENTAGE OF CROP DAMAGE WOULD NOT BE PREPARED UNTIL THE FIRST OF AUGUST, IT WAS CLEAR THAT MOST OF THE RICE CROP WAS RUINED IN THESE REGIONS. THE LITTLE RICE THAT THE FARMERS WERE ABLE TO PLANT WAS REPORTEDLY BEING THREATENED BY AN INSECT BLIGHT THAT WAS AGGRAVATED BY DROUGHT CONDITIONS. UNDP OFFICIAL SAID THAT HE WOULD RECOMMEND UN IMMEDIATELY PROVIDE INSECTICIDES AND LATER CORN, CASSAVA, AND OTHER ALTERNATIVE CROP SEEDS SO THAT FARMERS COULD PLANT A SECOND CROP ONCE THE LATE HEAVY RAINS SUBSIDE. HE SAID THAT THE RICE SHORTAGE IN LAOS WAS SEVERE BUT THAT THE UNDP WOULD NOT MAKE AN APPEAL FOR INTERNATIONAL EMERGENCY FOOD AID UNTIL REQUESTED TO DO SO BY THE LPDR.

2. AN LPDR OFFICIAL TOLD UNHCR OFFICIAL WEEK OF JULY 20 THAT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD NEED 100,000 TONS OF PADDY TO FEED THE POPULATION UNTIL THE 1977 RICE HARVEST COULD BE COLLECTED. HE SAID FOOD SHORTAGE WAS CAUSED BY POOR 1976 HARVEST AND WITH PROJECTED POOR 1977 HARVEST YIELD THE LPDR WILL FACE ANOTHER FOOD SHORTAGE NEXT YEAR AS WELL.

3. SEVERAL LAO SOURCES TOLD EMBOFF THAT FOOD WAS SCARCE IN RURAL PROVINCIAL MARKETS BUT THAT PRICES WERE CONSIDERABLY LOWER THAN THOSE IN VIENTIANE. A
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LAO STUDENT WHO CAME TO VIENTIANE FROM VIENGSAI IN MAY TOLD EMBOFF THAT FOR THE LAST SEVERAL MONTHS THE GOVERNMENT FED STUDENTS ONE BOWL OF RICE TWICE DAILY RATHER THAN THREE TIMES AS BEFORE. SOURCE SAID THE GOVERNMENT PROVIDED WHITE RICE BROUGHT IN FROM VIETNAM, NO MEAT, AND ONLY A LIMITED VARIETY OF VEGETABLES TO STUDENTS. SHE SAID CANNED GOODS WERE AVAILABLE IN THE STATE STORE BUT THAT HER FAMILY COULD ONLY PURCHASE TWO CANS OF FISH PER WEEK.

4. A VIENTIANE RESIDENT TOLD EMBOFF JULY 21 THAT HE SENT RICE TO RELATIVES LIVING IN LUANG PRABANG BECAUSE THERE WAS NO RICE AVAILABLE THERE.

5. NORTH OF LUANG PRABANG IN PHONGSALY, FOOD WAS ABUNDANT AND CHEAP IN APRIL, 1977, ACCORDING TO A VIENTIANE RESIDENT WHO VISITED THERE, BUT MOST FOOD-STUFFS WERE BROUGHT IN FROM THE PRC.

6. A LAO WHO RECENTLY VISITED LUANG NAM THA PROVINCE REPORTEDLY SAID THAT BUFFALO MEAT SOLD FOR 180 KIP PER KILO BUT THAT IT WAS SELDOM AVAILABLE.

7. A SOURCE WHO CAME TO VIENTIANE FROM ATTOPEU MARCH 1977 SAID THAT RICE SOLD FOR 40 KIP, FISH AND BUFFALO FOR 150 KIP, AND PORK FOR 200 KIP PER KILO BUT THAT QUANTITIES WERE SMALL.

8. A SAVANNAKHET RESIDENT TOLD EMBOFF THAT IN JUNE MEAT WAS AVAILABLE FOR ABOUT 700 KIP PER KILO AND THAT JUNE 20 THE LAO GOVERNMENT HAD TIGHTLY RESTRICTED THE IMPORT OF SMALL GROCERY GOODS FROM THAILAND AT MUKDAHAN. UNDP OFFICIAL SAID HE SAW NO RICE OR MEAT SOLD IN THE THAKHEK AND SAVANNAKHET FREE MARKET WHEN HE VISITED THERE JULY 21 AND 22.

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9. A RELIABLE LAO SOURCE TOLD EMBOFF THAT THE GOVERNMENT PURCHASED 4,500 TONS OF GLUTINOUS RICE FROM THAILAND JULY 18 TO TRANSPORT TO PAKSE EVEN THOUGH THAT AREA WAS TRADITIONALLY A SURPLUS RICE PRODUCING REGION.

10. JULY 20, ONE WEEK AFTER THE VIENTIANE MUNICIPALITY IMPOSED STRICT MARKET CONTROLS, THERE WAS NO MEAT OR GLUTINOUS RICE AVAILABLE IN THE FREE MARKET. SHOPPERS

WERE ABLE SECRETLY TO BUY WHITE RICE AT THE FREE MARKET RATE OF 600 KIP PER KILO (THE GOVERNMENT RATE IS 60 KIP PER KILO) BUT MANY WERE AFRAID TO DO SO BECAUSE THE LOCAL MILITIA HAD ARRESTED BUYERS AS WELL AS VENDORS DURING WEEK OF JULY 11. MORE LOCAL VEGETABLES AND FRUIT WERE AVAILABLE IN THE FREE MARKET BUT IN SMALLER QUANTITIES AND AT HIGHER PRICES THAN NORMAL. CONFIDENTIAL

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11. A RESIDENT IN A RURAL VIENTIANE PLAIN VILLAGE SAID ONLY ANIMAL FEED QUALITY RICE WAS AVAILABLE (REF A).

12. A WESTERN AID WORKER WHO VISITED AN AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVE 55 KILOMETERS NORTH OF VIENTIANE JUNE 29 SAID THAT OF THE 110 FAMILIES IN THE COOPERATIVE TWENTY FAMILIES WERE COMPLETELY OUT OF RICE AND ANOTHER SIXTY FAMILIES WILL SOON BE WITHOUT RICE. HE SAID THE GOVERNMENT HAS DONE NOTHING TO PROVIDE RICE EVEN THOUGH IT WANTS THE COOPERATIVE PROJECT TO SUCCEED FOR POLITICAL REASONS. THE COOPERATIVE TURNED OVER RICE IT PRODUCED TO THE GOVERNMENT AS AN AGRICULTURAL TAX LAST DECEMBER IN GOOD FAITH THAT IT WOULD BE RETURNED WHEN THEY WERE IN NEED. "NEW VIENTIANE" NEWSPAPER CARRIED AN ARTICLE JULY 22 THAT SAID THE VIENTIANE PROVINCIAL COMMITTEE WOULD "LEND" RICE IT COLLECTED AS AN AGRICULTURAL TAX TO CERTAIN PEOPLE IN THE PROVINCE.

13. IN ADDITION TO TIGHTENING CONTROLS ON BUTCHERING DOMESTICATED ANIMALS (REF B), LPDR PARTY NEWSPAPER "VOICE OF THE PEOPLE" JULY 20 REPORTED THAT THE GOVERNMENT BANNED HUNTING OF WILD ANIMALS OF ALL KINDS FOR THE NEXT FOUR MONTHS. THE ARTICLE SAID THE BAN WAS TO PROTECT THE DWINDLING WILD ANIMAL POPULATION IN LAOS. (COMMENT: A GOVERNMENT BAN ON HUNTING MAY BE INTENDED TO KEEP VILLAGERS OUT OF FOREST AREAS SO THAT THEY CANNOT CONTACT RESISTANCE ELEMENTS. BAN ON HUNTING WILD ANIMALS, IF ENFORCED, WOULD MOST HURT POOR VILLAGERS WHO RELY ON WILD GAME FOR PROTEIN. END COMMENT) CONFIDENTIAL

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14. ACCORDING TO AN LPDR OFFICIAL, THE GOVERNMENT HAS

TEMPORARILY CUT BACK THE MONTHLY RICE ALLOTMENT IT SELLS TO GOVERNMENT WORKERS IN VIENTIANE FROM 100 KILOS (FOR A FAMILY OF FIVE OR MORE) TO 24 KILOS. SOURCE REPORTEDLY SAID THAT THE GOVERNMENT TOLD WORKERS IN VIENTIANE THAT IT HAS SUFFICIENT RICE RESERVES BUT MUST CUT BACK ON THE AMOUNT IT SELLS TO WORKERS BECAUSE IT CANNOT MILL IT FAST ENOUGH. ALTHOUGH STATE STORES SELL RICE, THE SUPPLY IS FAR BELOW DEMAND AND FEW PEOPLE ARE ABLE TO PURCHASE ENOUGH RICE FOR THEIR FAMILY'S NEEDS.

15. A SOVIET PHYSICIAN WITH WHO AND A FRENCH PHYSICIAN WORKING AT THE MUNICIPAL HOSPITAL SEPARATELY TOLD EMBOFF THAT THE INCIDENCE OF MALNUTRITION HAS MARKEDLY INCREASED AMONG THEIR LAO PATIENTS BOTH IN VIENTIANE AND IN THE COUNTRYSIDE. SOVIET PHYSICIAN SAID THAT MANY LAO SUFFER CRITICAL VITAMIN DEFICIENCIES BECAUSE THEY DO NOT GET THE RIGHT TYPES OR SUFFICIENT QUANTITIES OF FOOD. BOTH DOCTORS SAID BECAUSE OF THE GENERAL AND WIDESPREAD MALNUTRITION COMMON DISEASES OFTEN CAUSE DEATH.

16. COMMENT: THROUGH A COMBINATION OF MISFORTUNE AND POOR "CENTRAL PLANNING" THE LPDR FACES A SEVERE FOOD SHORTAGE FOUR MONTHS BEFORE THE NEXT UNPROMISING HARVEST CAN BE COLLECTED. INTERNATIONAL AID MAY HELP ALLEVIATE SUFFERING SOMEWHAT. NONETHELESS ANY RICE AID IN QUANTITIES LAOS IS LIKELY TO GET WOULD MOST LIKELY BENEFIT ONLY URBAN POPULATIONS AND GOVERNMENT WORKERS BECAUSE OF THE POOR DISTRIBUTION NETWORK AND GOVERNMENTAL MISMANAGEMENT. IT IS EXPECTED THAT LIVING STANDARDS AND HEALTH CONDITIONS WILL CONTINUE TO DETERIORATE AND THAT MORE LAO WILL FLEE TO THAILAND. CORCORAN
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Message Attributes

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